

VIII. Solzhenitsyn as Southerner

The dragon is by the side of the road, watching those who pass. Beware lest he devour you. We go to the Father of Souls, but it is necessary to pass by the dragon.

—St. Cyril of Jerusalem, quoted as epigraph to
A Good Man Is Hard to Find by Flannery O'Connor

I have been in the dragon's belly, in the red burning belly of the dragon. He wasn't able to digest me. He threw me up. I have come to you as a witness to what it's like there, in the dragon's belly.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn, to the AFL/CIO in
New York City, July 9, 1975

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When Alexander Solzhenitsyn was forced into exile in the West in February 1974, I was waiting the release of my new novel *Fugitive*, living (as I still do) in a small Georgia town in a sparsely populated county. Our citizens here, my neighbors, were largely unaware of either dramatic event, though I knew that my novel would be of passing interest since its setting was so local as to memorialize some community history and landmarks. What effect Solzhenitsyn's exile would have on local consciousness was doubtful. I don't know how many of my neighbors, even now, would recognize his name. Certainly a house-to-house poll made in the swift, efficient modernist mode would show him a stranger here, though were I to spend a morning at the barbershop or a few evenings on front porches talking about him, my neighbors would very soon recognize the sense in which Solzhenitsyn is our cousin. Such discovery of old relationships, though, requires the manners and pace of an older day. Aeneas, an unknown exile in Italy, discovered his old kinsman Evander and claimed Evander's aid because of blood ties and family honor: "We are bound together . . . by the old ancestral kinship and by your broad fame." And even under the

pressure of defeat by the Turulians, Aeneas lingers with Evander to restore a relationship through ceremony stronger than the moment's crisis.

Such might be my own importuning words to the famous Solzhenitsyn, so that he might, as a strong exile himself, help me recall my neighbors to ancestral virtues now heavily besieged by the forces of modernism. Here in Oglethorpe County we are increasingly tempted to believe that some new Rome of a strange foreign devising might be built overnight, on principles of "need" determined by a house-to-house survey of our present appetites and then interpreted in Washington, D.C., or its branch offices, the social science departments of various universities. I fear tarpaper cities built on the rubble of older ways; I fear that uninhibited appetite is the end our natural hungers bring us to when unordered by ceremony. I notice, for instance, that the considerable advertising campaign in support of the 1980 census attempted to imbue a color-the-slot document with mystical powers: depending upon the citizen's faithful execution of the document and his faith in it as revealing his own essence, a general national revival is in the offing. That modern sibyl, the computer, will be giving us the necessary signals. If, as Solzhenitsyn said with shocking effect at Harvard, the West is increasingly given to operating "according to the letter of the law," at the "extreme limit of legal frames" in pursuit of "more things and a still better life" in the materialistic sense of those terms, it is also given to valuing the individual and his community as abstract facts, mystically interpreted by statistical priests. Our perfect response to the census will result, we are told, in a just and equitable distribution of goods and services by the Federal Father, and then we shall all be progressively happy.

I have watched Solzhenitsyn with fascination and with ironic pleasure, knowing that we both hold certain principles as central to the meaning of individual and community life, however much distorted and obscured those principles have been by the forces of modernism. I have listened to him with thanksgiving, pleased at the large and larger audience attracted to him in places where those principles seem more thoroughly clouded and obscured than they are here in Crawford, Georgia. So, whether or not particular of my neighbors at once recognize in Solzhenitsyn the kinships I see between them is not my concern. What is of concern is whether we here will continue to bear witness to those common principles. I have every confidence in Solzhenitsyn's steadfastness; but I am less certain about my community's, given the insidious and unspectacular invasions by that modernist spirit that I attempted to expose in my *Fugitive-Agrarian* novel. For in the South as in the nation there has been a subtle shifting of spiritual and political values to materialistic ends, as witnessed by the promotionism surrounding our current census. Still, those kinships are strong enough at the moment to promise recovery. And I know that as Solzhenitsyn works his

work in the larger arena of Western and American consciousness, we do the same here in Oglethorpe County—enough of us to keep the principles alive.

We Southerners in particular, then, welcome this displaced person from the East, whose enemies are our enemies—the man whom *Time Magazine* calls “Russia’s greatest living writer.” That description is *Time*’s apology to its readers for presenting an essay (February 18, 1980) it calls as “grim” as Solzhenitsyn’s Harvard commencement address of 1978, an essay of “Advice to the West, in an ‘Hour of Extremity.’” The apology is necessary, *Time* feels, since “many Americans will find Solzhenitsyn’s views too harsh, his vision too chilling.” Still, if popular comedians, actors, singers have been media-elevated to the rank of spiritual and political leaders, their random views certified by media exposure and validated by their “art,” who is *Time* to deny Solzhenitsyn a hearing? For he, too, has become both popular artist and evening newsfare no less than were Jane Fonda or Joan Baez and a host of international statesmen née popular entertainers of the 1960s. Solzhenitsyn’s reputation as fiction writer requires *Time* to give his views “wide attention,” though the reader is warned to proceed at his own risk. (In its review of *From under the Rubble*, a Russian version of *I’ll Take My Stand*, *Time* was even more cautionary on November 25, 1974: “In the West, the essays may buttress the conviction of Solzhenitsyn’s critics that he is a mystical reactionary who places too much faith in the values of the Orthodox Church and Old Russia.”)

My own *Fugitive* I shall set aside here after observing briefly that it grew out of a long devotion to Fugitive-Agrarian arguments, putting them to the test as they engage an accelerating modernism in this Southern ground, that insidious undermining that threatens the spirit I treasure here in Crawford. It explores the ground of a local experience out of which (in a phrase from *I’ll Take My Stand*) a “genuine humanism” must grow, as opposed to that intellectually derived and largely academic and ultimately rootless “New Humanism” that the Agrarians found inadequate to rescue the life of man in community. The salient Agrarian passage is in their “Introduction: A Statement of Principles”: “[Genuine humanism] was not an abstract moral ‘check’ derived from the classics—it was not soft material poured in from the top. It was deeply founded in the way of life itself—in its tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs.” The drama I projected was of a would-be Agrarian’s attempt to regain this genuine humanism. My protagonist, who comes by his principles through the academy (he is a Vanderbilt graduate), receives his comeuppance when he attempts to pour those valid principles “in from the top.” I tried to dramatize the weakness of such misguided attempts and thereby imply the firmer ground necessary: the intimate experience of the world out of which intellectual principle emerges, our daily struggle in what Eric Voegelin calls the “In-Between.”

For that is the ground where principle must take root and grow into one’s

life. Principle is seldom to be recovered or established by the forced spectacle that was so widespread in the 1960s, the daily confrontations between largely ignorant factions given to conflicting dreams of some instant Eden. It grows slowly in a struggle of spirit in oneself as it reaches outward to the world through the bonds of community. I might put that struggle in scholastic terms, to which such kindred spirits as Saint Thomas, T. S. Eliot and Donald Davidson, or Solzhenitsyn and my unlettered neighbors in Crawford would and do subscribe. For, though they may not share the terms, these diverse people share an understanding of the things the terms name out of experience. As Saint Thomas expresses the point: "Although the knowledge which is most characteristic of the human soul occurs in the mode of *ratio*, nevertheless there is in it a sort of participation in the simple knowledge which is proper to higher beings, of whom it is therefore said that they possess the faculty of spiritual being." One possessed of that distinction between *ratio* and *intellectus* may not command the terms, but he is already forearmed against the distortions of his soul which separate the two modes of knowledge in that soul. In our age the separation has occurred widely, elevating reason to an absolute in whose name "soft material is poured in from the top" through federal formulas. Accompanying such external imposition of abstract order is the elevation of feeling (the *understanding* divorced from *reason*) whereby occur radical denials and destructions of our sense of reality through vague collective social passions. In sum, we are being structured as a people through formulistically executed sentimentalities.

As a young man, T. S. Eliot was concerned with a "dissociation of sensibility" in English letters, a separation of thought and feeling which he declared to have occurred at about the time of Dryden and Milton. But that dissociation has been more general in our history than its literary symptoms reveal. It may be said to begin in the Renaissance, leading to the conspicuous antipathy of the nineteenth century to the eighteenth century—the struggle between an age of "reason" and an age of "romanticism." But the struggle is not one accounted for simply by reference to the dominance of one position at a particular time in the concourse of history. The antipathy of thought to feeling is fundamental in human nature, and the struggle occurs for each when he attempts to come to terms with creation. Excesses of thought or of feeling may give a particular color to a calendar segment of history, giving an age its name (ours seems to be the Age of Alienation). But the struggle against dissociation knows no date: it is the ambiguous sign in the individual soul of that fortunate curse called Original Sin, an inheritance from that "Fortunate Fall."

Whatever one's calendar reads for the particular person in time, his understanding calls him to an open surrender beyond himself. It is a call to see the self in a perspective of creation that acknowledges the Cause of creation, what Solzhenitsyn speaks of as "a Supreme Complete Entity." The Agrarians, charac-

terizing the Southern address to this Cause, speak of "the God of nature," an openness toward whom helps distinguish the Southern mode of being, with its garrulous hospitality and celebrated manners. On the other hand, the individual's *ratio* is that consolidating inclination of the soul that attempts closure, that is tempted (when untempered by the understanding) to elevate the self by separation from the rest of creation through alienating Pride. Donald Davidson, seeing us "still Yankee, still Rebel," recognizes this difference in the more reserved manners and cautious hospitality of our New England cousin who is more given to *ratio* than we. But he knows a kinship, nevertheless, which rests on fundamental grounding of both Yankee and Rebel in our common human nature.

The Southerner's fascination with and fear of Pride and his sense of the relation of *intellectus* and *ratio* as faculties of the soul are still very much evident. As our literature shows, it affects our sense of drama to the degree that we are suspicious of deterministic ideas, seeing the dramatic center to be the individual will as it wrestles with dissociation of reason and understanding. Thus the Southerner tends to be suspicious of social programs that ignore the complexities of the real social world, in which for him Original Sin is an important complication; he is suspicious of abstract programs that would reform a community by pouring solutions to human problems "in from the top." In the 1960s such a Southerner watched with distress the rival attempts of a secularized Activist Left and a seemingly Establishment Right to gain dominion. If only, he might be heard to say, if only those mobs in the Chicago streets and those in conference at the 1968 Democratic National Convention would sit down and read *I'll Take My Stand*.

Another sign of the Southerner's attitude toward the complementary roles of reason and understanding is to be found in his strong sense of the family as the viable social structure, his sense that the family is bound together as individuals in a particular place and in a manner beyond the power of reason alone to comprehend. Accompanying this attitude is his address to nature as an existence in which one discovers the presence of the God of nature. The Nashville Agrarians took their stand upon historical ground heavy with these concerns. One might say that theirs was an "ecological" concern, but a concern built upon a spiritual base. But theirs is not simply "Southern" ground: it is more ancient than American history and more universal than the North American continent, to be recognized wherever man is in tune with his portion of the world. Here is that knowledge expressed by Heraclitus, who speaks of a vision of the creatures of nature through which one finds himself "listening to the essence of things"; by William Wordsworth, who through such a vision "sees into the life of things." It is in the biblical injunction to "be still, and know that I am God." It is in the plaintive lyric of a country singer, "Don't you hear that lonesome whippoor-

will / So sad he cannot fly; / The moon has gone behind a cloud; / I'm so lonesome I could cry." (Such "lonesomeness" is not answered at last by another person, but only by another Being; the relation between country music and country religion has been almost destroyed by commercialism now, one of the insidious accomplishments of the enemy of spirit.)

Southern spokesmen have often failed to articulate this Southern position, which is pervasive of the "Southern life" they attempt to maintain. Or rather, they have not articulated it in a mode persuasive to its "Northern" opponents, particularly during the South's most spectacularly beleaguered history—the period from about 1850 to the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*. Some of the reasons they failed to do so are brilliantly presented by Richard Weaver in his *Southern Tradition at Bay* and in several of his essays. But the failure was a relative one. That is, the Southerner did not attempt his defense of principles in the strict mode of the *ratio*, and those in whose souls the *intellectus* had atrophied could hear little of what he had to say. Flannery O'Connor puts the difference succinctly when she says, "The Southerner knows he can do more justice to reality by telling a story than he can by discussing problems or proposing abstractions." It is "his way of reasoning and dealing with experience." The consequences of those differing modes she also remarks caustically: "I have found that anything that comes out of the South is going to be called grotesque by the Northern reader, unless it is grotesque, in which case it is going to be called realistic." The flowering of letters in the South in this century is directly out of the Southerner's concern to do justice to the complexity of reality, and that literature has in it a stand taken against the "Northern" inclination to value abstraction as reality, a species of gnosticism. For, again to quote that perceptive defender of the Southern vision, Flannery O'Connor, "a view taken in the light of the absolute will include a good deal more than one taken in the light provided by a house-to-house survey." And so she declares herself, as artist, to be "a realist of distances," through which vision she sees the transcendent in the immanent; as writer she dramatizes an active presence of the transcendent in the imminent action.

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Art, the Southerner believes (even when he does not call himself an artist), serves transcendent vision through its faithfulness to proximate nature. He is likely to see "science" as reducing nature to fact, which is then mystified by statistical exegesis. Thus storytelling becomes for the Southerner his homage to

the largeness of reality, as well as a means of resisting deformations of reality by abstractionism. Indeed, storytelling becomes one of the modes of his worship of the God of reality through which he sustains a piety toward creation—and most particularly toward that special creature of God's creation, man. Through story he bears testimony on behalf of reality, whether in the courthouse or on its lawn in the shade of trees, or on his front porch, or in his multitudinous churches so given to dramatic revivals of the spirit. It is in the light of the absolute that he holds fill-in-the-blank questionnaires suspect. What he is and has been he finds better served through such documents as Ben Robertson's *Red Hills and Cotton*, Horace Kephart's *Our Southern Highlanders*, Andrew Lytle's *A Wake for the Living*. Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* and *The Hamlet* and *Absalom, Absalom!* Tate's "Ode to the Confederate Dead" and Davidson's "Lee in the Mountains." Warren's *All the King's Men* and O'Connor's *Wise Blood* and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find."

I think it is safe to say that, although such works have sometimes received generous attention at the hands of critics, they have not often been wisely understood in their implications about man's spiritual place in the world. Miss O'Connor puts the matter more fiercely: "no matter how favorable all the critics in New York City may be, they are an unreliable lot, as incapable now as on the day they were born of interpreting Southern literature to the world." For they see Southern writers almost invariably as "unhappy combinations of Poe and Erskine Caldwell," especially when the grotesque is involved. Why has that vision Miss O'Connor defends failed to reach those critics and through them the popular American spirit? Because the Southern writer has been seen as separate from his vision? Seen as a reporter of social facts? Or separate because art is understood as trading in the grotesque to titillate the popular spirit rather than to celebrate reality? Miss O'Connor certainly felt those to be some of the reasons, insisting that in truth the grotesque character's "fanaticism is a reproach, not merely an eccentricity"—that "the freak can be sensed as a figure for our essential displacement" from reality in whom is revealed the drama of a struggle to regain his proper spiritual estate. Only in the disparity between his passion for reality which fuels his fanaticism and our age's general separation from complex reality does "he [attain] some depth in literature."

Miss O'Connor's "all the critics in New York City" is figurative, as a careful reading of her words in context shows. For though such critics as she means tend to congregate in certain places—New York City, for instance—she is speaking rather of a quality of mind than of all persons in a particular place. She is talking about a quality that one of the Fugitive poets characterizes as making one a "Yankee of the spirit." (Hence, my putting "North" or "Northern" in quotation marks is to suggest the distinction.) The "Southern" quality of mind tends to be most general in the South, though I know and value many "South-

ern" Yankees. The importance of this distinction will, I trust, emerge with increasing clarity as we proceed, through our focus upon Solzhenitsyn as "Southerner." Thus, in the light of this distinction, one surely sees Solzhenitsyn's Ivan Denisovich as a "Southern" grotesque character. But we must also observe in Ivan a depth not found in Erskine Caldwell's Jeeter Lester. All Southern writers are not Southern in the same sense, any more than all Soviet writers are Russian in the sense Solzhenitsyn distinguishes.

In Solzhenitsyn we have a Fugitive-Agrarian risen out of the most spectacularly suppressive regime of modern history, a regime that undertook a "Reconstruction" whose horrors the Southerner is better able to appreciate than most other Americans. For we endured the prelude to such modern reconstructions of reality as we see raised to an ultimate horror in the twentieth century. And though now exiled by the Soviet Reconstruction, Solzhenitsyn speaks as one deeply anchored in place. From "*what* soil should one fight the vices of one's country?" he asks in "The Smatterers." It is a plaintive cry of one whose native soil stains him in an unforgettable way. "I live," he says, "in constant awareness of my desire to return to Russia, and I know I will go back." We might recall Granny Millard's handful of Sartoris soil, which she carries with her as she flees the invader in Faulkner's *Unvanquished*. Or, less poignantly put than Granny's action or Solzhenitsyn's words though no less particularly tested by necessity, we remember Flannery O'Connor's remark that "the Southern writer apparently feels the need of expatriation less than other writers in this country. Moreover, when he does leave and stay gone, he does so at great peril to that balance between principle and fact, between judgment and observation, which is so necessary to maintain."

Of that "Northern" spirit (as we might label it) which denies Solzhenitsyn his roots, he says, "Spiritually all intellectuals nowadays belong to a diaspora. Nowhere are we complete strangers. And nowhere do we feel quite at home." He attacks that Sovietist spirit for its deliberate and systematic destruction of "men of the soil" so that they might be replaced by those "people of the air, who have lost all their roots in everyday existence." In distinguishing between "men of the soil" and "people of the air," he is making the separation that Allen Tate makes between men who are regional and those who are merely provincial. But we must recover our sight, says Solzhenitsyn, who speaks with a voice dedicated to and convinced of an ultimate emergence of the regional man over the provincial. That is the most healthful burden of his prophecy, without which his vision would be "grim," "harsh," and "chilling" indeed.

As I watched a provincial man, Walter Cronkite, interviewing this regional Russian soon after his exile, I had already been gathering myself for some time to explore the ground out of which Fugitive-Agrarian principles had grown, under the working title of "The Prophetic Poet and the Popular Spirit of the

Age." One might say that my study is an exploration of a remark Stark Young makes near the end of *I'll Take My Stand*: "Though the South . . . is our subject, we must remember that we are concerned first with a quality itself, not as our own but as found everywhere; and that we defend certain qualities not because they belong to the South, but because the South belongs to them." They are qualities, I contend, more easily discovered to us in a community at a particular time when that community is anchored in particular place. Life, we discover as regional men—as "men of the soil"—is enlarged by our participation in common humanity in the neighborhood of hills and valleys and by streams we know with the Psalmist's certainty. The enemy to this view is that provincial spirit which would gather all men up into an aimless drift, a journey whose only end is the journeying. The community of which I speak shows us to be members one of another in a mysterious and fundamental way that binds forebears and descendants within a life much larger than the provincialist can see. For when existence has been secularized by Hegelian thought in the provincialist mind, that mind sees only *with*, not *through*, the eye.

When history is secularized, whether by Hegel or Marx or the New Humanists, "humanity" becomes a shibboleth whereby all existence may be manipulated: the reality of human life is (to use Eric Voegelin's term) "deconstructed" by whatever self-proclaimed lords of existence have declared the world a mechanism in need of repair. Now the first deconstruction necessary to the manipulation of being is the reduction of regional man to provincial man, under a range of catchy slogans such as Progress or Humanity. Those manipulations do not necessarily reveal themselves as Leninist or Stalinist purges. But though less spectacular than mass purges, they may yet be more fatally destructive of one's life through gradual, almost imperceptible shifts. We react sharply to the suddenness of someone being shot by dictate or killed in a highway accident, but not to a gradual attrition of spirit in us. That is a truth extremely difficult to make heard in the popular spirit of our age precisely because spirit has been so gradually displaced from reality. Such is the point Flannery O'Connor makes through her grotesque characters, for as she says, "to the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures." Hers, then, is the same understanding of this hour of our spiritual extremity that Solzhenitsyn recognizes when he reminds us that the tsar executed about seventeen persons a year, while in Stalin's purge forty thousand persons were shot each month and "15 million peasants were sent off to extermination" by Lenin. But his impassioned call is itself more persuasive than his facts, for we have been so buffeted by facts, so immured of spirit by statistics, that his comparison registers less upon us than his burning personal, accusing presence. He is as uncomfortable to behold as Miss O'Connor's Haze Motes in *Wise Blood*.

Those twelve Southerners of *I'll Take My Stand* understood community to

be much larger than its secular, geographical manifestation. The sense of place for them incorporated history in relation to the timeless, so that the local community of Harmony Grove, even when it changes its name to Commerce, carries in it a sense of the eternal. Through local particularity—*these* individuals of *these* families of *this* community—a sense of the spirit abiding in nature is acknowledged. Professor John Shelton Reed of the University of North Carolina pronounced at the annual meeting of the Southern Historical Society in Atlanta in 1979, “Industrialism is the Southern way of life. . . . The prototype of the New South may be the city we’re in today.” And C. Vann Woodward at that meeting, remarking the effect on the South of the Civil War, reminded his brethren, “The South did lose it, and one consequence was that the old planter influence was diminished, cut back, and the new group of industrialists and capitalists, typified by Henry Grady, took on a new role of leadership.” I have pointed out elsewhere the interesting correspondence between Henry Grady’s New York speech after the war, in which he warned the North that the South would bury it with its own industrial spirit, and Nikita Khrushchev’s New York address to the West in which he asserted “we are going to bury you.” (It is this same New South spirit that in fact led a town near Crawford to change its name from Harmony Grove to Commerce.) But though both historians pronounce the South now succumbing to a deracinating industrialism, Professor Reed goes on to point out the South’s continuing attachment to local over world affairs and its continuing attachment to organized religion. Thus a Yankee, he says, may ask you what you do, but a Southerner still asks you where you are from. And Professor William C. Havard of Vanderbilt reports the response of a middle-aged black man to such a question: “I *stay* in Chicago, but I *live* in Alabama.” I have heard Andrew Lytle argue that the most telling form of the Southerner’s address to a new acquaintance is “Where do you bury?” In Lytle’s inclusive sense of *you*, not only the individual and his immediate family are incorporated in a family body, but his “people” as well. In such language resides that Southern sense of place as a window upon the eternal.

The Agrarians understood and believed in these customs to which the South belonged, and still does. Finding them dangerously threatened by the industrial spirit, they celebrated such customs as essentially Southern, in the context of recent American history. They talked of “the South” as a “minority section” besieged by an “American industrial ideal.” They saw such Southerners as Henry Grady as scalawags. Yet they were quite careful to make clear that an agrarian society such as they valued “is hardly one that has no use at all for industries, for professional vocations, for scholars and artists, and for the life of the cities.” Their concern was that life be anchored in nature itself. Now this is not the same concern as Henry David Thoreau’s. For Thoreau, an independent individual must be freed of community by his attachment to nature. Never-

theless, the Agrarian position was often attacked as if it were the same as Thoreau's, as if it were radically separatist. Since the 1960s Thoreau's influence has grown, but his is not an influence that will serve to strengthen community as the Agrarians sought to do.

The most immediate resistance to the Nashville Agrarians took the tack of distorting their position into a form of reactionary romanticism, whether of the Thoreauvian variety or of some vague throwback to an imaginary feudal dark age. These Agrarians, it was suggested, were merely a benighted remnant who attempted to advance long-since-discredited views of man and society. They wanted to "turn back the clock" largely because of their Bible Belt mentality. (This was a favorite phrase in Ralph McGill's annual attacks on their position in the *Atlanta Constitution*, McGill being the Henry Grady of the post-World War II South.) From our point of view in century's end, however, such arguments sound as shallow as Mrs. Lucynell Crater's provincial insistence to the drifter Mr. Shiftlet (in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own") that the "monks of old" just "wasn't as advanced as we are." The Agrarians said in 1930 that "modern man has lost his sense of vocation," that "the act of labor as one of the happy functions of human life has been in effect abandoned, and is practiced solely for its rewards." We know the observations as more intensely true than when spoken sixty years ago; we look back on the tumult of the 1960s with new eyes through *I'll Take My Stand* and better understand that recent painful decade.

The young in the 1960s were struggling, though most of them blindly, to escape those provincial reductions of life against which the Agrarian took a stand. But they found few of their elders who understood the causes of their discomfort any better than they did, few who could point them toward a sounder recovery than their confused actions promised. With no West to "light out to," they became deracinated Huck Finns, shrewd in their perception of society's failures but unwise in their pursuit of remedy. John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" of space explorations hardly served their hunger. One could watch the first steps taken on the moon over and over, but not smell the dust stirred. Vicarious participation in such realities cannot satisfy the desire to participate in reality. It is an indictment of our intellectual community that many of those young people were cast wandering, becoming "people of the air." That phrase seems particularly suited to the so-called flower children, those frail orchids in the modernist jungle. Some of them turned, in desperation and with violent consequences, to such of their elders as Herbert Marcuse. For where could they learn of *I'll Take My Stand* or of Richard Weaver's *Ideas Have Consequences*, of Josef Pieper's *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* or his *In Tune with the World*?

Those young minds—many of them—would certainly have understood and responded to the Agrarian attack upon a rampant industrialism to which they

gave a devil name, the Establishment; that was their attempt to name some Antichrist. They might have realized also that the Agrarian attack was upon both the secular left and the secular right and thus been rescued in some degree from recklessness. For it was the *secularist* aspect of industrialism that the Agrarian attacked, the reductions of both man and nature to efficient and material causes in the interest of product. The twelve Southerners saw such products as the dead end of applied scientism and said so. Hence they found little sympathy in either political camp. Nor did they find much support among those intellectuals increasingly encamped in the academy, those mediators of an optimism about the new god, Progress. By 1930 that new god had long since been established as worshipful in the American mind, and the God of nature as understood by regional man had been cast out by what the Agrarians called "the American or dominant" spirit. And here the academy's influence in this displacement needs brief consideration as a primary agent in our spiritual displacement.

iii

Near the turn of this century, Charles W. Eliot, having rescued Harvard University from its old role in American life as the formal support of mind in relation to spirit, bid farewell to that school which he had succeeded in tailoring to the service of the state through his long tenure. In his "Religion of the Future," as we have seen, he said that the new religion "will not be based on authority, either spiritual or temporal," since "the tendency towards liberty is progressive." There was to be "no worship, express or implied, of dead ancestors, teachers, or rulers." It would not be "propitiatory, sacrificial, or expiatory." Above all, it must not "perpetuate the Hebrew anthropomorphic representations of God." It would be dedicated to "service to others," and its contributions would be to "the common good." What, in such requirements, could Karl Marx object to? For either President Eliot or Marx, here was suitable ground upon which to build the future. The common good was now to be defined, whether in the name of Marx or Eliot, by a modernist spirit which understood man as a recent accident of an anciently accidental natural world, still genially referred to as "nature." Man by accident was somehow suited to elevate himself over nature as nature's god. President Eliot called for the reduction of regional man to provincial man; his sermon was a prophetic charge to educational institutions, a charge received and advanced since the 1909 address until it permeates the American academy. But the American academy, in modeling

itself on Eliot's Harvard, has effected a displacement of man from reality. Thus, although Stalin's precipitous handling of the "kulak problem" registers upon us more spectacularly, the subtle displacement of regional man through "education" has been as destructive. Indeed, one suspects that it has been even more pervasively destructive of our nation than the Reconstruction of the South was to the South. The crises of the cities in the past two decades seem evidence to the point, about which problem a vast library now exists.

The Agrarian symposium ran headlong into that "American spirit" which Charles Eliot had conjured, a spirit as much at home on the political right as on the left. Solzhenitsyn encountered that spirit at Harvard in his commencement address. In the reaction to his address, as in the reaction to *I'll Take My Stand*, we discover that "Agrarian conservatism" is a creature apart. The Vanderbilt spokesman asserted that "the first principle of good labor is that it must be effective." But, they added, "the second principle is that it must be enjoyed." Labor must be enjoyed in and of itself, as one enjoys raising nature by art through an ordinate respect for the reality both of nature and of one's own gifts. The industrialism they saw as enemy to labor is "the economic organization of the collective American society," through which labor and pleasure have been effectively disjoined. Through that separation, harmony between community and nature became progressively dissonant. The good seen in labor, by either the laborer or his director, was translated into a final product, which in turn was translated by abstraction into dollar "value," in which figure joy was at best fractional. (The recent history of the American dollar on the world market is an ironic commentary on this point.) *Good* was lost to *goods*, and *goods* to abstract reckoning. Thus the spiritual struggle of answering one's "calling" in nature, of finding one's proper labor within the range of one's gifts, was shifted to an economic struggle, primarily a worldly and worldwide struggle. And that struggle came to center on the distribution of goods, in consequence of which (for the individual) labor became increasingly divorced from leisure, rather than being intimately related to leisure as it must be for one's spiritual health. Divided man is left in two worlds, the world of nine-to-five and the world of his ersatz leisure. But he can find satisfaction in neither.

Industrialism's "goods," from the Agrarian perspective, are seen as nature manipulated by abstraction for abstract ends. The holy texts of this new religion of nature, to be submitted to exegesis by both political left and right, are statistics. Thus an authorized text could be established upon which was founded an orthodoxy, President Eliot's "Religion of the Future." What followed was a Reformation, the breaking away of secularized labor from secularized capital. "But nature industrialized," the Agrarians had warned in their introduction, when "transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature."

Through such pictures "we receive the illusion of having power over nature, and lose our sense of nature as something mysterious and contingent." The God of nature under these conditions becomes "merely an amiable expression, a superfluity, and the philosophical understanding ordinarily carried in the religious experience is not there for us to have." *God* as an amiable expression soon loses all meaning; profanity ceases to be profane. The order of language, whether in court or in conversation, begins a rapid decay; oaths speak less and less to the integrity of persons or community (though one is still well advised to choose words carefully in many Southern communities). As Miss O'Connor's Haze Motes discovers to his increasing frustration, blasphemy is impossible without belief, even as pornography is impossible where physical unions are reduced from a sacred sacrament to merely civil ceremony. Miss O'Connor's Shiftlet, in "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," remarks of his civil marriage to the idiot child Lucynell Crater, "That was just something a woman in an office did, nothing but paper work and blood tests."

To put our point from another perspective, the Agrarians were characterizing industrialism as that aspect of the provincial mind which, since Eric Voegelin, has been spoken of increasingly as secular gnosticism. This modern gnostic attitude toward nature holds that man's mind is the first cause of creation. Put in a Marxist form, as Voegelin shows by quoting Marx, "Nature as it develops in human history . . . as it develops through industry . . . is true *anthropological* nature." Now that conclusion is only a step down from the pre-Marxian position that God, rather than nature, is anthropological. Once God has been officially pronounced anthropological, as was done in the eighteenth century, one does with the term *God* whatever he will, using it amiably as Ralph Waldo Emerson tends to do or exiling it from the language altogether as the more rigidly deterministic positions require. But when the same conclusion as to the cause of nature is reached, whether by Emerson or by Marx, nature itself becomes merely prime matter for the exercise of one's will. There are no longer any strings attaching nature to a reality conceived as larger than man's consciousness; there are certainly no strings attaching nature to the God of nature.

Marx is observing, we note once more, an attitude toward nature that is compatible to gnostic capitalism no less than to gnostic communism. The structure he would build upon this view of nature differs from the capitalist structure, but it is not radically different because the first principle of man's relation to nature in each is the same. That is the point Solzhenitsyn made at Harvard in 1978. But in order for either Marxist or capitalistic structure to be erected on that first principle "reality must be destroyed" in the popular mind, as Voegelin says. "This is the great concern of gnosis," since gnosis "desires dominion over being" above all else. Such is the elevation of knowledge over nature by the *ratio*, and it leads to destructive separations within the individual

soul. As Flannery O'Connor says, "Judgment will be separated from vision, nature from grace, reason from imagination." And the most significant aberration in this deconstructed nature is man himself. From a regional amplitude he is reduced to a provincial estate, to be exploited by the lords of gnostic power.

iv

In his Harvard commencement address, Solzhenitsyn took up the argument against the gnostic attitude toward creation. In that speech he quotes Marx as saying that "Communism is naturalized humanism," and adds: "One does see the same stones in the foundations of a despiritualized humanism and of any type of socialism: endless materialism; freedom from religion and religious responsibility . . . ; concentration on social structures, with a seemingly scientific approach. . . . Such is the logic of materialistic development." The words were almost as direct an attack on President Eliot's Harvard as Solzhenitsyn might have made had he known in advance the prescription for "The Religion of the Future." Now the Agrarians included in their own indictment of the modern secularist world both the communist and the New Humanist. And they too saw the same stones in the foundations of capitalism. These several factions, supporting a common philosophy, were focused for them in the term *industrialism*. But in particular they characterized a species of socialist entrepreneur, the "Optimists," those advocates of gnosticism who "rely on the benevolence of capital, or the militancy of labor, to bring about a fairer division of the spoils. . . . And sometimes they expect to find super-engineers, in the shape of Boards of Control, who will adapt production to consumption and regulate prices and guarantee business against fluctuations: they are the Sovietists." They are also, we have pointed out, such "super-engineers" as President Eliot had geared Harvard to manufacture for the state, though the Agrarians in 1930 were looking primarily at the experiment underway in Russia and at the many "Sovietists" who were rising to activist roles in American society, particularly in industrial centers, rather than in the academy. (We remember that Warren had suggested calling the symposium "Tracts against Communism.") Nevertheless, their words were prophetic of the social and economic engineers who were even then entering the federal bureaucracy and would do so in swelling numbers after the election of that son of Harvard, FDR. Charles Eliot's inaugural address as president of Harvard in 1869 had laid out a program for the education of just such engineers. He restructured during his tenure not only the educational philosophy and its pragmatic program at Harvard but, through his influence,

all higher education in this country. (His most generally remembered contribution is the elective system, through which mind is adjusted to pragmatic prospects by a tailored program of courses.) Thus he effectively undercut all that remained of the old ideal of a liberal education, though that ideal still has a struggling existence in many private and a few public schools.

Well aware of such destructions of higher learning, the Agrarians warned that the decay of human values, of "true humanism," would continue apace, whether under the auspices of the federal state through its boards of control or under those of corporations through their boards of directors. In either instance the first job of such engineers is to restructure the attitude toward nature held by the popular spirit. From that restructuring follows a redistribution of the spoils of nature, whether by the hands of Astors, Rockefellers, Goulds or by the hands of their counterparts, the managers of the socialist state. The point is worth emphasizing: whether the laws for the control of nature are advocated by the industrial right or the industrial left, those laws are derived from the same principle; the blueprints of *laissez-faire* capitalism, of state socialism, or of that totalitarian amalgam of the two, communism, are strikingly similar when the controlling vision has lost sight of the relation between nature and nature's God. But if man's final end is the consumption of goods, whatever the mechanism advocated, the "quality of life" thus championed must inevitably be determined at the level of a merely biological function. And however glowingly advertised in the name of the common good, the "good life" is still defined from a presumption that man is a self-refined animal and nothing more. Gone from one's labor is any sense of a calling, and gone from the laborer's "director" is any sense of stewardship under the grace of a Supreme Complete Entity.

Most tellingly, those losses are reflected in the reduction of mystery from ceremony, whether at the family supper or at the community feast. The bonding of community to a transcendent mystery dissolves along with its bonding to history. Thus we should observe with equal misgiving the Soviets' rewriting of history and our own rewriting. The pernicious docudramas of popular television and the manipulation of historical dates, initially to the convenience of federal labor schedules, are alike symptoms of a pervasive disease in the spirit. When Washington's or Lincoln's birthday is shifted to the proximity of Sunday, by acts of congress, those historical men begin to slip anchor in history and float as vague figures, more nearly disembodied gods than fathers, upon whom the rhetoric of a false worship may be the more easily focused. When manipulations of the reality of our history become an acceptable form of artificially induced ceremony, we end up with such radical deconstructions of community as I recently witnessed just across the county line. A historian of my acquaintance, whose field ironically is local history, engineered a Mardi Gras Ball in a dominantly Protestant neighborhood to raise funds for preserving the neigh-

borhood. The "Fat Tuesday" dance was held on a Saturday night at the YWCO gym—a week and a half after Ash Wednesday. Such perversions of history, trading on nostalgia—that remnant of feeling out of a decaying spiritual hunger—make it evident that it were better for a people to tear down a neighborhood already lost and begin all over again. Genuine humanism emerges from our deportment in nature toward family and community history. It is revealed in our intimate relations to "tables, chairs, portraits, festivals, laws, marriage customs," as the Agrarian "Introduction" puts it. Which is to say that such a humanism requires that we value our history in nature with a piety that does not pervert community or its history for either sentimental or pragmatic ends.

Industrialism as we have been defining it—an attitude of the gnostic mind toward creation—leads men to lose that joy which is the effect of festival rightly taken. For, as Josef Pieper puts it, "Underlying all festival joy kindled by a specific circumstance [whether family supper, community gathering, or a legitimate Mardi Gras] there has to be an absolutely universal affirmation extending to the world as a whole, to the reality of things and the existence of man himself. . . . *To celebrate a festival means: to live out, for some special occasion and in an uncommon manner, the universal assent to the world as a whole.*" But a festival "without gods is a nonconcept, is inconceivable." However much Southern festival may have lacked the support of theological argument such as Pieper brings to his discussion in *In Tune with the World*, a festival joy is nevertheless the center of that Southern life the Agrarian defends. It is at the heart of Southern manners. It is in the ceremony of family reunions (see Eudora Welty's *Losing Battles*). It is in our regular church gatherings, but especially at those all-day gatherings to which people from California or New York return home, away from the place they stay to the place they live. It is in those more solemn gatherings with which we bury one of our own. It is in our storytelling on quiet summer evenings on the front porch, or when we draw about the kitchen or parlor fire on fall and winter evenings. For the Southerner knows, through an understanding beyond the reach of the *ratio*, that (in Pieper's words) "existence as we know it . . . does not just 'adjoin' the realm of Eternity; it is entirely permeated by it," whether we are at labor or at festive rest.

The gnostic address to existence, on the other hand, chooses as its absolute authority the *ratio*, denying the more fundamental truths about existence that the understanding must certify. By an act of will it chooses, through its gnosis as instrument, to disembodify the self, to separate mind from nature in the interest of a dominance over nature, as it has already separated itself from the transcendent. And thus gnosticism comes to occupy a place which is no place, being neither in the natural nor in the spiritual world. But the gnostic must so deport himself, for otherwise he would be forced to abandon his insatiable hunger for

power over being. John Milton cast the gnostic's motto in memorable, seductive verse. It is the battle cry of the New Prometheus who, since the Renaissance, would commandeer both theoretical and applied science: "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven." But Milton puts those words in the mouth of that great angel fallen from brightness, who having denied reality must at last lament the hell within himself. He is doomed henceforth, as storytellers have it, to walk up and down, to and fro in the land, in an agony of placelessness, as the eternal tester, the canvasser of souls and salesman of emptiness.

V

The Southerner's suspicion of the traveling salesman is a commonplace in our folklore. It is a theme sufficiently present in our art to warrant a scholarly monograph. Thus Mrs. Lucynell Crater's suspicion of Shiftlet in O'Connor's "The Life You Save May Be Your Own" has initially to do with the question of what he has to peddle. "What you carry in that tin box?" she asks in response to Shiftlet's testing question "what is a man?" (There are certain touches in the story, incidentally, that suggest Miss O'Connor is mischievously reducing the story of Job to its modern ironic equivalent. Shiftlet is a wandering spirit presenting himself as carpenter, though he is of the company of Job's adversary rather than of Christ, and Mrs. Crater is hardly so just and upright as Job.) Salesmen are held suspect by the Agrarians as well, and they find advertising "along with its twin, personal salesmanship," a disturbing development out of industrialism. "Advertising means to persuade the consumers to want exactly what the applied sciences are able to furnish them. . . . It is the great effort of a false economy of life to approve itself."

The grounds of the Southerner's suspicions, however, are deeper than those exhibited by such writers as Sinclair Lewis in *Babbitt*, just as the Agrarian understanding of the nature of community differs from Lewis's version in *Main Street*. Lewis finds the difficulty of a Babbit or a Sauk Centre in their smallness and localness, the corrective perhaps lying in an enlargement, as is suggested by Lewis's own troubled journey eastward to New York and beyond. Advertising's effort to sell a false economy is not so simple as an attempt to sell a new soap or cereal to the unsuspecting. It is exhibited in its falseness in those attempts to move new federal programs; the advertising budgets of federal agencies have reached outrageous proportions since 1930. One finds the same procedures in the pages of *Pravda* as in the *New York Times*, the consumer providing the cost

of wooing himself to a suspect cause in one way or another, whether through the open market, through his income tax, or through his labor in some Soviet factory or commune.

What profits it to lose one's soul in winning the world? Solzhenitsyn asks that question of a startled West, a question put in the arena of politics but at a level more radically disturbing than either economics or sociology or political science is usually willing to address. In 1980 he insists that the West is losing, if it has not already lost, another world war, "without a battle," through a "spiritual impotence that comes from living a life of ease." In 1974 he had come to us insisting that "the problems of the West are not political. They are psychological and moral. When dissatisfaction with government is expressed, it should be understood not in terms of political failure but in terms of weakened religious and ethical foundations of modern society." The only salvation for East or West, therefore, "lies in a moral and religious rebirth." That such a diagnosis touches a hunger in the popular spirit is at least suggested by the 1976 election in which, whatever the degree of naïveté in the candidate or the voters, an obscure rural candidate with a "born-again" message was elevated to the presidency. (Not without unfortunate consequences, however, for the *intellectus* [understanding] requires its complement, the *ratio*, without whose aid one stumbles toward recovery as if by instinct, guided only by "wise blood.") Those economists who approach the market in this present year of inflationary disaster through their applied science are more and more acknowledging the truth of Solzhenitsyn's judgment and increasingly warning that it is our "faith" which must overcome the panic reflected in the roller-coaster movements on Wall Street or the fluctuation of gold and silver on the world market.

Neither side of that division within the body of industry—labor or capital—is easily persuaded of the necessity of recovering spiritual being as the solution to social disorder, particularly since the residual faith of a whole people has been effectively shifted from the transcendent Cause of being to rest in an applied science that promises a multiplicity of temporary ends. Thus the Agrarians had to overcome difficulties larger than geographical divergences of "North and South." For when one's understanding does not support his reason in an encounter with the Agrarian position, whether he be of the secular right or left, one easily confuses the position with the hypothetical socialist position. Agrarianism must constantly extricate itself from that distortion. The confusion is understandable in part, given the celebrated "agrarian reforms" practiced in Russia, China, even in the Shah's Iran, and widely advocated as the solution of all problems in the Third World. Within the context of American history and closer to home, however, that confusion is worse confounded by the ambiguous presence of populism in the Southern mind. The Nashville position touches upon populism here as that phenomenon has emerged in the past hundred years

from that increasingly beleaguered yeoman spirit which is deeply rooted in our Anglo-Saxon history. It would appear, however, that populism has been marginally effective in the national arena to the degree that it has been able to ride unmatched horses. For the populism that has grown out of an ancient English inheritance has increasingly revealed itself as *statist*, while advancing itself in the name of those regionalist ("conservative") principles which the Agrarians defended. Jimmy Carter would seem to have been successful largely through his pragmatic skill in riding these antithetical positions at a time of confused spiritual crisis in the national soul.

Since the Agrarian symposium, however, a host of Southern politicians not unlike Carter have maintained their base of local power largely through socialist programs, in spite of their national cartoon images as arch-conservatives. These politicians have argued in Congress for programs based on "conservative" principles—in the name of tradition, of the individual's birthright, of family and community. But beneath the surface of that posture has lain an egalitarianism through which local power has been maintained but which gnaws at our regionalist principles like cutworms among tomato plants. That specimen of our political bestiary, then, the Southern conservative congressman, has too often succeeded in his accumulation of power not simply through the conservative—"conservationist"—principle he embraces publicly once he has gotten to Washington while voting otherwise; that step is consequent upon egalitarian reductionism at the local level. Thus he has confused political issues to a degree that his conservative cousins outside the South, though allied with him on many issues, have felt uncomfortable in that alliance. One may appreciate the existential circumstances that tempt him to such strategy: it grows out of a forced unconditional surrender of the South in 1865 and the severe effects of Reconstruction. Yet we must recognize in such strategy the compromising of those abiding principles the Agrarians were recalling to us and the considerable damage done to those principles through such strategy.

The Agrarians were aware also of the confusing and often misleading emphasis in the dominant American mind upon that "Peculiar Institution," slavery. They resisted the growing insistence that slavery was *the* cause of their late unpleasantness with the North, memorialized under the dates 1861–1865. In consequence, they often found themselves unjustly labeled "racist." Slavery has been a highly visible issue in the political arena since the 1800s, as the whole nation is acutely aware in the current social concerns. But if we are to recover an equilibrium in a community of black and white, quiet minds must begin to consider whether racial problems are more symptomatic than pathological, a concern too easily raised by passion beyond the guides of understanding and reason. Consider how peculiar a circumstance is the "Southern system" in which the "little man," downtrodden by the rich and powerful (as an argument

goes), maintains his "Jim Crow" institutions, whether under the leadership of Tom Watson or Gene Talmadge or Senator Bilbo. But equally, though less spectacularly, confusing are the obligations of Herman Talmadge to the remnants of the rural woolhatters, who have provided him the necessary popular vote, and to the industrialists, the corporations with seats of power in Atlanta. In such confusion, one must insist along with Solzhenitsyn that such political contradictions have cause in spiritual confusions about our relation to each other, to our place in nature, and to nature's God.

Beyond question the Southern Agrarian ground has in it the bacilli of a spiritual anthrax that breaks out in public as foot-in-mouth disease again and again. Money-lined raincoats are a recent symbol, causing Herman Talmadge the loss of his senate seat. Less recently, we remember the story of a folk politician who, when caught lining his pockets, insisted with vehement conviction, "Yes! I stole it! But I stole it for *you*!" We acknowledge the ground as contaminated, then, but it is contaminated as all lost Edens are—by a failure that is spiritual and not geographical or social or economic or political. Yet we necessarily return to that ground, which is a literal, geographical place: it is the ground upon which we must build, for there is no other. To exist at all, one must exist in some place at some time. But we may stand where we are in ways more knowing of dangers hidden in place so that our spiritual and moral failures will not allow us to abandon the valuable principles we have fallen from. There are still among us strong souls who insist that an always threatening failure requires that we regain those ceremonies through which alone lost innocence is ameliorated in community. Those ceremonies above all require that one resist a reduction of community, of family, to numbers in an egalitarian manipulation of souls to socialist or capitalist ends, especially when the manipulation is put in the name of Southern or states' rights. Such strong souls hold most firmly that community does not exist simply *now*, the point of time at which gnostic expedience is always attempting to obscure the reality of man's place in nature—always attempting to impose provincialism upon regional man. For this sense of community implies that the present moment bears in it the fruits of yesterday (not brought, or seldom brought, to full harvest) and the seed of tomorrow (flawed by the old loss we credit to Adam). Despite the imperfections, or rather more truly *because* of them, we hold to a truth inherited from our fathers and everywhere certified by present realities—a truth that reality itself refutes the reductionism in egalitarian shibboleths, those secular versions of lions and sheep and jackals in millennial Edens. Nature itself involves hierarchy, we observe; it is therefore a principle to be honored as the structure of reality, a structure particularly reflected in any viable community. That does not mean, of course, that such a truth does not carry with it the threat of spiritual destruction by

prideful usurpation of authority in the structure of public office. Original sin is a principle Willie Stark insists upon most persuasively in *All the King's Men*.

vi

The hierarchic principle of reality which we see in nature and in community exists in an anagogic dimension for the Southerner; Saint Paul speaks of that dimension through a metaphor, and significantly to citizens of a corrupt Rome: "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." The most immediate manifestation of Saint Paul's hierarchic principle, to the Southerner, is in his family. And because the family is the earthly structure through which the individual discovers his ordinate membership in a nature and state whose head is Christ, family structure is overridingly important. C. S. Lewis distinguishes the family from the collection of bodies to which modernism would reduce it, in words tellingly to my point:

A row of identically dressed and identically trained soldiers set side by side, or a number of citizens listed as voters in a constituency, are not members of anything in the Pauline sense. . . . How true membership as a body differs from inclusion in a collective may be seen in the structure of a family. The grandfather, the parents, the grown-up son, the child, the dog, and the cat are true members (in the organic sense) precisely because they are not members or units of a homogeneous class. They are not interchangeable. . . . The mother is not simply a different person from the daughter, she is a different kind of person. The father and grandfather are almost as different as the cat and dog. If you subtract any one member you have not simply reduced the family in number, you have inflicted an injury on its structure.

Even so in the Southern understanding of family (as indeed in Lewis's own) a member is never subtracted, whether by death or by his own chosen expatriation. When he strikes out for the West, or even when he serves time at the county or state prison farm, his participation in the family body continues, though he may appear removed to the world's eye. Even death does not remove a member's presence, though that presence may be ignored. (The organic nature of the Southern family is spoken to beautifully by Ben Robertson in *Red Hills and Cotton*.)

This fundamental stone in community, the family, has to be torn down if the

gnostic value of the individual as a unity of "homogeneous class" is to be established. The varied assaults of modernism on the family have been a conspicuous labor of the past two centuries, reaching disastrous proportions since World War II. For the organic structure of the family stands against those attempts to restructure human nature so that the individual may be displaced from his sustaining community membership and then artificially reassembled as a component of an abstract, rationalistic structure. The Southern family still contends with a perversion of family membership as affected by the natural-rights doctrine that rose ominously in the eighteenth century; in its most destructive guise this doctrine reduces man to the status of animal, as the term *animal* had already been reduced from its implications of naming the *creatura* of God. The holiness of existence, because it is God's creation, was thus exorcised from all nature; being was thus opened to the conquest of mind, and the strongest mind was justified in doing its own thing with nature. One might study at length, I believe, the destructive consequences of this displacement in the confused lives of estranged children, particularly the spectacular phenomenon of children's eruptions from the family in the 1960s. In "doing their own thing" so many of them were but imitating on a small scale the gnostic attitude of the powerful "Establishment" they took themselves to be opposing. Thus the family as we describe it here—the locus within which the individual discovers his bond with nature, with community, and with the God of nature and community—was eroded from within as it had been systematically deconstructed from without.

The Agrarian arguments, though blanketed and dampened by the advocates of the prevailing American way, smoldered but were not extinguished. They began to break into flame again in the popular fiction of Flannery O'Connor and the essays of Richard Weaver. Then came Alexander Solzhenitsyn, bearing his witness to a strikingly similar life, grown out of a common ground. His experiences were given magnitude by a political history larger than the personal, including the accelerated decline of the West and the ascendancy to power of the Soviet world; his prophecy could hardly be ignored. A Misfit rejecting the prevailing way of East and West, a disturbing displaced person pointing out to us the same stones in the foundations of East and West, he insisted that the fundamental crisis in modernism is spiritual. "Among enlightened people," he said with cutting irony in New York City (and how Miss O'Connor would have treasured the irony of place), "it is considered rather awkward to use seriously such words as 'good' and 'evil.' . . . But if we are to be deprived of the concepts of good and evil, what will be left? Nothing but the manipulation of one another." The protest he encourages is "a protest of our souls against those who tell us to forget the concepts of good and evil." For their evil counsel denies the nature of reality precisely so that the world may be made into an arena within

which we manipulate each other, without the shadowing presence of conscience upon our manipulative acts.

Initially Solzhenitsyn was attempting to rally the West to an opposition to communism. Increasingly he has discovered a West so like his East in its spiritual decay, in its rejection of spiritual (as opposed to so-called social) conscience, that he engages us more and more as if a Southern evangelist at a summer revival. It was as embarrassing to some people, enlightened from a concern with good and evil, to have Solzhenitsyn deliver that Harvard commencement address as it might have been had Billy Graham delivered it, or Miss O'Connor's Haze Motes. For he raised fundamental questions about the quality of spiritual life in the materialistic West. And not a few of his listeners have come to agree with the woman in Haze Motes's audience: "He's nuts."

vii

So the Southerner may watch with concern the "Northern" reaction to the presence among us of that fearless, blunt man, but he will watch with some amusement as well. For Southern humor is one of the modes whereby the Southerner is enabled to endure the mystery of evil. Particularly he watches the drama of encounter between the "American or prevailing way" of life and the indomitable Solzhenitsyn. He will appreciate in particular Walter Cronkite, the Captain Kangaroo of the American way, in the presence of this strange prophet from the East. He will appreciate, as Solzhenitsyn's distress of the moment could not allow him to do, Cronkite's seeming bafflement over the Russian's outrage at being forced from his native ground. Why was this strange man not delighted by prospects of a new life in the enlightened West? Of course, one may also be moved to anger rather than amusement at a recent interview between Cronkite and a Sovietist, one Vitali Kobysh, a fellow journalist, an official of the Central Committee of the Communist party in Moscow, and quite possibly a KGB operator. This time Kobysh did the interviewing. According to Kobysh's version of the interview, to the question of why Cronkite would agree that "the Soviet Union menaces someone, that our people are preparing for war," Cronkite answered, "If you watched my program every evening for several years you must know that I never agreed with that and do not agree." (Lost in the response, of course, is the distinction between faith in a possible illusion and facts of reality, the lack of which distinction Reed Irvine's "Accuracy-in-Media" repeatedly shows to be a common failure of our media.) Furthermore,

Cronkite is said to have responded, "An honest person cannot believe that [the Soviets menace anyone or prepare for war], and I am positive that the overwhelming majority of Americans do not believe it. But they are thoroughly muddled. They are being scared on all sides." By whom? asked Kobysh. "By those who for various reasons consider it useful," Uncle Walter is reported as responding. Whether Kobysh's account of the interview is accurate I do not know, but Cronkite has not consented to correct the interview as printed in two Soviet magazines. Cronkite's administrative assistant reported to Reed Irvine that neither the tapes of the interview nor their transcription could be found, adding, "It's like Watergate." Perhaps, though, Uncle Walter has laid the groundwork necessary so that some year soon he may be commencement speaker at Harvard. If so, we Southerners will listen to the report of his address on our evening news with some amusement, but with some anger as well.

For a little while longer may we afford to be amused by the general circus displays of the spiritual displacement of our national spirit; we do not at the moment face the stark horrors of repression that Solzhenitsyn, Ginzburg, Sakharov, and the like have experienced. However, it is important that as we wait and watch we remember and keep alive the careful distinction Solzhenitsyn draws between the Russian spirit and the communist ideologist, a distinction with analogy in our separation of the regional man from the provincial man. "It pains us," says Solzhenitsyn, "that the West heedlessly confuses the words *Russian* and *Russia* with *Soviet* and *U.S.S.R.* To apply the former words to the latter concepts is tantamount to acknowledging a murderer's right to the clothes and identification papers of his victim." (It is the same pain I sometimes feel on hearing Jimmy Carter explained as a typical Southerner.) But leisure for amusement in such confusions is almost over; it is increasingly clear that Western gnosticism is more insidious and subtle but equally destructive, and its symptoms break out more violently at every hand in this new decade. Khrushchev's declaration to America was "We will bury you!" That bluff challenge, delivered as he pounded his shoe on the podium, has itself been buried under a new approach to the competition between Eastern and Western gnosticism. Solzhenitsyn observes, "Now they don't say 'we are going to bury you' anymore, now they say 'Detente.'" And it was a senator from Georgia, Sam Nunn, who saw in the Salt II negotiations the very Soviet strategy Solzhenitsyn warns against. But it was also a president from Georgia who only slowly began to suspect the possibility of Soviet subterfuge. That irony speaks a division in the South too troubling to be very amusing.

What a Southerner of my persuasion fears is that our national spirit more and more breathes within a world whose thermostat and filters are set by gnostic intellectuals; a climate in which there are more destructive contaminants than the Southern intelligence and will may detect, certainly more than

the Midwest Research Institute can measure, given its emission standards in respect to "quality." Only after forty years have we become aware at last of the dangers to the human body of its breathing the air of asbestos plants. How long before we discover the effect upon spirit of those filaments of modernism taken in more gradually and revealed more slowly in the popular spirit? But these are the more fatal contaminants of being in the light of the transcendent vision upon which the Agrarian position is founded, ultimately more dangerous than the radiation level at Three Mile Island. If we watch a program of managed evening news night after night as if it were a bedtime story, accepting Uncle Walter's comfortable words that "that's the way it is," we may wake some morning to a strangely altered world.

And so we Southerners make welcome this outlandish Russian, who speaks so effectively against "the American or prevailing way" of life, recalling us to known but forgotten truths about man and his place in the world. We value his personal testimony, which our grandfathers would understand and which we trust our children may come to understand: "I have been in the dragon's belly, in the red burning belly of the dragon. He wasn't able to digest me. He threw me up. I have come to you as a witness to what it's like there, in the dragon's belly." He affirms and defends certain qualities of life not because they belong to the Russia he loves, but because the Russia he loves belongs to them. Without those qualities, life becomes meaningless. If we lose them, we shall wake to find only a dream world in which our bonds with illusion leave us in an ultimate horror of spiritual emptiness, the desperate moment Haze Motes experiences: "There are all kinds of truth, your truth, and somebody else's, but behind all of them, there's only one truth and that is that there's no truth. . . . Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it." That is a dark morning of the regional man as he discovers himself transformed almost completely into the provincial man. He will live nowhere, only stay in random place. He will be citizen of a boundless state larger and more empty than can be described by *Southern* or *Northern* or *American* or *Russian* or *Soviet*—the state Milton's fallen spirit attempts to celebrate:

The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.

In those words lies the death of family, community, country—the death of the whole person and of those workings of the spirit through such persons joined in a community, of which we should properly be members.